The Many Benefits of Community-Based Conservation

Cattle bunching promotes healthier pastures and attracts grazing wildlife. (USAID/Riccardo Gangale)

In 1990, Namibia became the first African nation to incorporate environmental protections into its constitution.

Before Namibia's 1990 independence, tourism was controlled by a private minority group. Locals received little benefit from tourism, and few had incentives to conserve. Namibia's wildlife populations plummeted as poaching and droughts increased.

Then Namibia's government made another bold move. With the help of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), it shifted the rights and responsibilities of managing wildlife and land onto local communities.

Known as Living in a Finite Environment, or LIFE, this project brought together the Namibian government, USAID, the World Wildlife Fund and several local partners. Together, they provided conservancies with technical support, training, grants and regional coordination.

To become a conservancy, communities had to define their borders and membership, establish a governing committee, develop a benefit distribution plan and adopt a legal constitution. In return, they earned the rights to hunt animals for their own use, manage protected game and permit trophy hunting within a quota.

Today, nearly one in four rural Namibians belongs to a registered conservancy. Wildlife is a valued asset. Poaching is no longer acceptable, and many native species have thrived.

LIFE has become a model. In 2004, USAID helped launched a similar project in Kenya called the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), an organization that includes pastoralists, landowners and the Kenyan government. Both projects illustrate the benefits of community-based conservation.

Thriving wildlife

Conservancy members know the more wildlife they have, the more tourists they can attract. Elephant sightings in Kenya's Sera Conservancy, for example, increased 366 percent after NRT's establishment.

What's more, less than a third of elephant deaths on NRT's conservancy lands are caused by poaching — a stark contrast to the 87 percent caused by poaching outside the conservancies. That's partly because poaching is seen as taking away from the community, and locals are more likely to report poachers.

Healthier lands

Many conservancies have instituted new land management practices. One such practice, cattle bunching, lumps herds of cattle in one place for grazing instead of allowing them to spread out. This

helps break up the hard soil while giving the unused land time to heal. Once the cattle have eaten through one patch, herders move them onto another, allowing the first patch time to recover.

These improved grazing practices have resulted in fatter cattle and higher incomes. By 2012, conservancy pastoralists had sold $1.17 million of cattle.

More jobs

Conservancies can partner with private companies to open safari lodges, sell trophy hunting licenses to professional hunters and make handicrafts such as jewelry.

In Namibia, LIFE has created 547 full-time and 3,250 part-time jobs. In Kenya, women from NRT conservancies sold $85,000 worth of jewelry in 2011 alone. In fact, NRT conservancies earn more than $1 million every year from tourism, livestock and jewelry.

Greater development

Any money the conservancies make is shared among the members. Many conservancies use this money to compensate pastoralists who've lost livestock, to subsidize education for its members and to start new projects like growing cash crops.

In most conservancies, about 60 percent of gross income is put toward development projects such as increasing access to water or improving road infrastructure.

Better governance

For USAID, the process matters as much as the product. It's not just about conserving wildlife or creating jobs. By encouraging inclusive decisionmaking, LIFE and NRT are cultivating good governance.

Through community-based conservancies, locals are learning how to hold their representatives accountable — and how to replace them when necessary. Meanwhile, representatives are learning how to manage resources and funds on behalf of their members.

To Develop Ecotourism, Protect Wildlife

Faye Ndiaga explores Senegal's ecosystems by canoe. (Courtesy of Faye Ndiaga)

From his canoe, Faye Ndiaga surveys the mammals, birds, reptiles and flora living along Senegal's

mangrove-dotted river banks. He wants to ensure the fragile ecosystem is around for future generations to enjoy.

“I don’t want to wait for an animal species to be endangered to bring protection,” he says. “Some animal species like the rhinoceros are endangered and the struggle to protect them is hard because we did not try to do that earlier,” says the 29-year-old YALI Network member who hopes to work in Senegal’s tourism industry or with a nonprofit devoted to wildlife and environmental protection.

Senegal stretches from the semiarid Sahel savanna in the north to tropical forest with in the south. It spans wooded hills in the southeast to mangrove-lined estuaries on the Atlantic. The country’s wildlife includes terns, lions, elephants, giraffes, hippopotamus, manatees, turtles and gazelles. It hosts a variety of coastal birds and wetland and grassland waterfowl. Reptiles range from snakes, lizards and crocodile species.

A lowland waterway in Senegal. (@ AP Images)

Ndiaga thinks his nation is ideal for a diverse industry devoted to hosting guests that appreciate its cultural and environmental resources. Already a tourist destination for many Europeans, Senegal has the potential to attract even more visitors from the United States and Asia and to create “green” jobs, he believes.

> *“My goal is to polish the image of Senegal,” Ndiaga says, adding that “if we want to develop ecotourism, we must protect the wildlife.”*

Faye Ndiaga, right, and a friend examine a beached sea turtle. (Courtesy of Faye Ndiaga)

The environmentalist says that by raising public awareness of the need to protect endangered species, Senegal can avoid harmful practices like the unnecessary hunting of migratory birds. He stresses that protecting natural resources is the responsibility of all nations. “Protect animals before they are endangered,” Ndiaga implores.

Ndiaga’s dream for a responsibly-developed ecotourism industry in Senegal has support. He notes that Senegal’s government acts to protect the environment in several ways. It “encourages its citizens to work more to protect the environment,” protects its parks and wildlife reserves through a national forest agency, and provides safe refuge to endangered species imported from other countries, he says.

We All Belong to One Ecosystem

> *"We all belong to one ecosystem. … Economic growth needs to be done in a responsible way that has minimal impacts on the environment."*

That statement, by 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow Bruce Ernest, sums up what YALI Network members expressed about conservation during a recent Facebook #YALIChat. Ernest, a business sustainability expert who volunteers at a wildlife and conservation society in Zambia, was joined during the three-day chat by Cindy-Lee Cloete, an environmental educator in South Africa, and Mantoa Moiloa, a park manager in Lesotho.

Comments focused on wildlife management, sustainable development and going "green" — what Ernest called the "triple bottom line of economic growth, social equity and environmental protection."

The discussion covered the importance of educating everyone about the need to conserve natural resources, governments' responsibility to form policies to protect the environment, and the relationship between tourism and conservation.

Endangered elephants enjoy a drink of water. © AP Images

Moiloa advises people to teach others to do their part to protect the environment. For example, people can learn to raise seedlings to replace felled trees. They can learn about foods that can be alternatives to meat hunted in the wild. And they can learn to regularly discard waste in proper containers instead of dropping it on the ground. "Let's not keep silent when we see our fellow human beings litter," she wrote.

Ernest said that communities can come together to create local laws aimed at protecting the environment and wildlife. Companies can do more to be green by adopting efficient production methods and by adhering to local environmental laws and regulations. "Future companies will have no choice but to go green and act in a responsible way," he wrote.

Conservation and tourism

Henok Hiruy said tourist companies that appeal to travelers concerned about the environment are using a good business model. "By focusing on social issue[s], they tend to connect people with similar causes," he said. He and others asked how ecotourism can better benefit local communities.

In response, Chikondi Thole said that people who live near tourist attractions can "creatively sway attention" and bargain with tour operators to get deals that will provide them with more of the tourist dollars.

Who is responsible?

Herbert Nyirenda questioned who is ultimately responsible for looking after the environment. "Do natural systems belong to the public or do they belong to corporate and private interests?" he asked.

The systems “belong to the public,” Cloete answered. She added that government and the private sector, however, have responsibility to manage the systems “for the benefit of all.”

“If we make green our environment, we can contribute to the world a balanced climate and clean air,” wrote Weldeyesus Gebrewahid.

‘Join Us to Conserve’

Mount Cameroon National Park intern Cynthia Sama explains the basics of conservation to a park visitor. Courtesy of Cynthia Sama

Thousands of tourists visit Mount Cameroon every year, leaving behind crumpled food wrappers, plastic bags, beverage cans and other nondegradable trash that blemishes the sides of the 4,040-meter volcano.

Their garbage is more than an eyesore. It is a threat to nearby communities who look to the mountain’s forest as a source of food, fuel and medicine and as a place of worship.

It is also a drag on what could be a thriving and sustainable ecotourism industry.

YALI Network member and Mount Cameroon National Park intern Cynthia Sama works with a team to clear up the problem. “The beautiful nature inspired me to choose this field,” she says. “I love to see people very happy, living in harmony with nature and themselves.”

Sama’s team helps visitors and their guides understand that conserving forest biodiversity and wildlife is essential to enjoying the mountain now and in the future. It encourages tour operators to do their part by picking up trash from trails and disposing of it properly.

The government helps in other ways. It identifies “high-value” ecosystems and employs “eco-guards” and foresters to protect them. It has adopted laws and policies and provides funds to sustainably manage the country’s natural resources and wildlife. And it sponsors training for people in mountain communities in how to cultivate cassava, plantain and yam, and how to raise bees.

Bolstering these efforts are environmental groups including Green Cameroon and ICENECDEV, both based in Sama’s hometown of Buea. Working with local communities, these groups provide environmental education and have introduced agriculture, water and sanitation, and health projects to improve residents’ lives in ways that are good for the environment.

Sama, 25, hopes that businesses will join the nonprofits. First, business owners can financially support conservation awareness campaigns. Then, they can start ventures in areas like producing

products made of natural materials, opening trash sorting and recycling plants, starting tree seedling nurseries, and even setting up nature-themed amusement parks, she says.

She believes that businesses that implement these practices will grow by attracting "environmentally friendly customers, especially foreigners." Those businesses also can serve as examples for other businesses in how to promote conservation and generate jobs, she adds.

Long-term, Sama wants "every single Cameroonian to be able to know what conservation is all about" and not to do things like "dumping wastewater on the floor" instead of flushing it into a sewage receptacle.

Sama also wants YALI Network members to appreciate the flora and fauna around them. "Nature is life," she says.

She urges members to "try as much as possible to keep nature clean and friendly for yourself and for your next generations. Obey the environmental rules and regulations of any country."

"Join us to conserve the ecosystem," she says.

Join #YALIGoesGreen this month. Learn how to get involved at yali.state.gov/climate

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Essential Resources for Growing Your Ecotourism Business

The travel and tourism industry continues to grow, offering new business opportunities. (rcrhee/Wikimedia Commons)

Despite occasional dips in annual growth, travel and tourism has flourished over the last decade, and the industry is expected to take back its role in driving global growth, creating jobs and alleviating poverty. In fact, the World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that 3.8 million jobs could be created by the tourism industry in sub-Saharan Africa by 2023. If you are ready to enhance your travel and tourism project — or to jump into this exciting industry — check out these resources.

Developing your plan. Building a new business is hard work. The U.S. Small Business Administration reports that 50 percent of new businesses disappear by the fifth year of operation. New businesses fail for a variety of reasons, from lack of capital to poor management. Yet there is one step that helps to address many of these issues, which is to develop a comprehensive business plan. Get started with USAID's toolkit Sustainable Tourism Enterprise Development: A Business Planning Approach [PDF - 3 MB].

Telling your story. People travel for a variety of reasons: to escape, explore, understand and participate. But at the core of the experience lies the destination — the place that hands something

to the traveler to keep forever and share with others. Whether your destination is rural or urban, rustic or hip, you need strategies to best tell your destination's unique story. Begin with USAID's workbook Tourism Destination Management: Achieving Sustainable and Competitive Results [PDF - 4 MB].

Figuring out what makes your destination unique can help attract tourists — and grow your business. (Chris 73/Wikimedia Commons)

Managing your people. Because people are essential to the travel and tourism industry, managing them well is essential to success. To help managers in the travel and tourism industry assess, design, implement and evaluate their workforce development plans, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has created this Guide to Assessing and Designing Tourism Workforce Development Programs [PDF - 9 MB].

Powering your business. Rural tourism is a rapidly growing sector of the global tourism industry. Since rural tourism operations are often in remote locations, ensuring a reliable supply of energy can be a special challenge. To help your tourism venture plan for reliable energy, read USAID's guide to Electrification and Efficiency Options for Rural Tourism Facilities [PDF - 1 MB].

If you are hungry for more tourism-related resources, consider enrolling in USAID's free Sustainable Tourism Online Learning Program.

Lessons Learned in Public Land Management

Crested Pool is just one of the thermal features that earned Yellowstone its national park distinction in 1872. (Neal Herbert/flickr)

Singled out for its unique thermal landscape, Yellowstone became the world's first national park in 1872. Since then, the U.S. government's approach to public land management has evolved, influenced by science and public opinion. National Park Service officials Patrick Gregerson and John Dennis offer lessons learned to others interested in public land management.

Identify unique attributes. What are the scenes, sounds, smells and stories that separate this land from other tracts? For Yellowstone, it is the park's position on one of the world's largest calderas and its possession of two-thirds of the world's geysers.

Consider cultural value. "I've really become sensitive to the park's cultural resources, and to seeing that they are of equal value to the natural resources," said Dennis, who began as a plant biologist. Although valued for its natural resources, Yellowstone holds spiritual value among Native

American tribes and witnessed storied westward expansion by early settlers.

Make a plan. “Planning provides a logical, trackable rationale for decisionmaking,” Gregerson said. A good plan answers questions like these: What is this park’s purpose? What makes it significant? What are its fundamental resources and values?

Involve everyone. “All citizens have a role in planning,” Gregerson said. The park service asks for input from state, local and tribal governments, nonprofit organizations and private industry whenever it is considering any action that might have an environmental impact. It records all discussions publicly and allows the public to comment throughout the process.

Keep an open mind. The U.S. Forest Service, for example, wanted to use a herbicide in Pacific Northwest forests to encourage conifer growth. Concerned about toxicity, a coalition of planters, scientists and residents worked with the agency to develop a plan that did not rely on herbicide for tree growth. That’s typical. Gregerson said agencies tweak most plans before implementing.

Look for mitigating measures. Agencies request a “mitigating measure” when environmental harm is done or public access lost. If the Bureau of Land Management extracts minerals, the park service could ask its sister agency (both are under the U.S. Department of the Interior) to offset the harm done by buying adjacent, equivalent — down to the number of trees — land.

Seek tourism and preservation. Managing parks so people can enjoy them is a park service mandate. “Many people have argued there is conflict between preservation and enjoyment,” Dennis said. “I’ve come to realize that it’s not a conflict — both are absolutely necessary to meet the purpose of the parks.”

Conservation: Good for the Economy, Good for the Future

Mantoa Moiloa (Courtesy of Mantoa Moiloa)

Up in the highest nature reserve in Africa accessible by motor vehicle, Mantoa Moiloa teaches people how to take care of the land and the animals and plants living on it.

“My passion for my country influenced my decision in a career,” says the 33-year-old Lesotho park manager and 2014 Mandela Washington Fellow. “I want to protect the beauty of the Mountain Kingdom for future generations.”

Moiloa manages the Bokong Nature Reserve, one of the Lesotho Northern Parks in the southern African country. It’s a position that has helped her understand that conservation and business have

close ties. Lesotho “boasts” of its areas’ natural beauty, she exclaims. “We are bound to conserve our natural environment so as to keep our tourism business going,” she adds.

Moiloa holds a bachelor’s degree in technology in ecotourism management from Tshwane University of Technology. She recently transferred to Bokong from the Liphofung Cave cultural and historical site nearby.

The conservationist works on many fronts to protect her country’s natural resources. She helps Lesotho’s community conservation groups identify and approve infrastructure restoration projects. She is involved with conservation awareness campaigns and helps law enforcement officers in efforts to stop illegal wildlife poaching.

While most of Lesotho’s most beautiful but fragile lands are protected by the government, Moiloa would like to see public officials establish an independent body to manage those areas and the country’s budding ecotourism industry. That body could reach out to international partners to help it identify other areas in the country deserving of national protection and conduct environmental impact assessments of proposed development projects, she says. It also could develop local and international marketing campaigns to entice visitors to Lesotho, touting the country’s geography and wildlife.

Moiloa says ecotourism can benefit Lesotho’s citizens economically. Job-creating businesses include those that sell handicrafts made by people living in the area; guide horseback-riding, hiking and bicycling tours to remote areas; offer cultural performances; and provide meals and overnight accommodations at lodges, in homes and at camps.

A lion rests in a protected park area of Lesotho. (Courtesy of Mantoa Moiloa)

Moiloa says environmentally friendly businesses can help make conservation a nationwide behavior, encouraging employees to use at home the same resource-saving practices they use at work. Such businesses “help the sustainable use of natural resources, conserving them for the next generation,” she says.

Moiloa says one way people can protect their natural surroundings is to adopt environmentally friendly lifestyles. That means doing things like recycling paper and glass products, reusing shopping bags, composting organic matter for garden fertilizer, using only the amount of water needed, not discharging pollutants into the air or water, and hunting and fishing legally.

So far, Moiloa, originally from Botha-Bothe, says that “only people in the communities near natural protected areas are aware of environmentally friendly ways of living.”

Long-term, Moiloa hopes that all Lesotho schools will teach students about the environment and conservation — lessons that are easily learned at a young age, she notes.

She urges other YALI Network members to do their part for conservation by pledging to plant at least one tree a year. “Let’s use our resources sustainably,” she implores. “The legacy of your grandchildren is in your hands.”